



***It's Our Time:
A Call to Action on Education
A Year in Review: 2010-2011***



A Call to Action on Education

On June 9th, 2010, National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo launched a National Call to Action on First Nation education. The Call to Action continues as an invitation to all people in Canada - to the corporate sector, philanthropic organizations, higher learning institutions, provincial and federal governments and groups and individuals – to join in this call for fairness and justice.

National Chief Atleo expresses appreciation on behalf of all First Nations for those who have answered the call. A strong national consensus has emerged that urgent action is required without delay. It is now time to take the next step where we begin to shape the critical change that is needed.

By supporting quality education at all levels, including skills training, we can ensure First Nations youth will reach their full potential, contributing to the well-being of their communities and Nations, and contributing to the shared prosperity of all who share this land.

A VISION FOR FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION AND CANADA

Our call to action is grounded in our firm belief in First Nations control of First Nations education – a movement started in 1972. Prior to the development of First Nations schools and the assertion that First Nations parents and governments must have a primary role in the education of First Nations children, graduation rates were dismal. In the sixties, there were only a handful of First Nations post-secondary graduates in all of Canada. Although there have been significant improvements and many successes across the country, our challenge today is to quicken the rate and pace of change. Not only must we not lose another generation – we must not lose a single child to the continuing legacy of past oppression and the unfairness of ongoing inequality.

Our call to action has five components:

- 1. Reconciliation** – The governments of Canada must reconcile our rights within education acts across the country. Canada's endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, an international standard to guide relationships between nation states and First Nations peoples, creates the appropriate framework to advance this work. In the United States, following their recent endorsement, special Senate hearings have occurred to begin such an effort of reviewing domestic legislation and policy in light of the UNDRIP.
- 2. First Nations education guarantee** – A secure fiscal framework is needed for funding for education – something that is enjoyed by every segment of Canadian society except for First Nations.

3. **Sustainability** – It is essential to have equitable funding arrangements based on real costs and comparable to provincial and territorial jurisdictions.
4. **Systems** – First Nation education must be supported through professional and accountable institutional supports delivering second and third level supports including First Nation curriculum, immersion in First Nation languages and First Nations post-secondary institutions.
5. **Support and Partnership** – Creating a positive learning environment in First Nations communities through linkages with organizations in the public and private sector to invest in our schools and our children.

WHY IS ACTION NEEDED NOW?

Investing in First Nations is not only a benefit to the social, cultural and economic well-being of First Nations communities, it is also a long-term and sustainable stimulus plan for Canada's economy. Statistics Canada has predicted that Canada will face a labour shortage by 2017 as baby boomers retire and there are fewer workers to replace them. With more than half of First Nations people under the age of 25, our youth can fill this gap, but only if they are empowered with the skills and education to meet the need. If we reach the targets we have set, First Nations workers would add \$179 billion to Canada's GDP by 2026 through employment and by reducing government expenditures on income support, social services, health care, and security.

First Nations schools are governed by outdated legislative, policy and funding frameworks dating back to the middle of the last century. A modernized framework to support First Nations education is needed now so that students can have the supports they require to succeed.



THE DIFFERENCE EDUCATION MAKES

- Less than half of First Nation youth complete high school **but when** First Nations youth complete high school, they are twice as likely to be employed.
- Only 8% of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, collectively, have a university degree, compared to 23% of the Canadian population, **but when** First Nations youth are able to complete a university degree, they triple their earning potential.

A MODERN APPROACH TO EDUCATION

To be successful First Nations children need:

SAFE AND SECURE PLACES TO LEARN

Dozens of First Nations communities do not even have schools. Children must leave their families and communities to attend school or forfeit their education. Many local classrooms are in fact a series of portable trailers without running water or adequate insulation, and many existing schools require extensive renovations to ensure children have safe and secure places to learn. Many schools were built according to outdated government standards which failed to anticipate the increase in the First Nations population.

LEARNING TOOLS AND A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Gyms, libraries, textbooks, computers, and science labs are essential elements in any school but these are often denied to First Nations children. The reason is that First Nations schools are funded in a completely different way than provincial schools. The funding approach is outdated, unstable, and depends on temporary program fixes which are introduced from time to time. On average First Nations schools receive at least \$2000 less per child yet are required to deliver a provincial curriculum by provincially certified teachers.

SUPPORTS AND STRUCTURES

First Nations schools require support from First Nations school boards and management authorities. Many have been established, but are not empowered through funding, policy and legislation in the same way as provincial education systems. Strengthening First Nations control involves providing parents with meaningful involvement in the education of their children. It means having classes and curriculum which reflect First Nations identities and needs. It means strengthening linkages to other jurisdictions, and with other education providers. It means providing high

quality, culturally relevant education to First Nations children wherever they attend school.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RELEVANCY

First Nations languages are the absolute core of First Nations identity. First Nations must have the opportunity to be educated in First Nations languages much the same as members of Anglophone and Francophone language groups have the opportunity to receive an education in those languages. Support for language teachers and relevant curriculum is vitally essential.

A FUNDING GUARANTEE

The Auditor General of Canada has noted that the federal approach to funding First Nations education is not accountable to Parliament, that there is a reporting burden on First Nations, and that these reports and other commissioned research are not being utilized by government to improve First Nations education. The funding program for First Nations schools was introduced in the eighties, before the age of personal computers, and has not changed since. Is this right? Fair? Just? Equitable? A new approach is required which meets the needs of First Nations students, schools, and school systems.



RESPONSE TO THE CALL TO ACTION IN EDUCATION

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In the year since we issued the Call to Action, we have witnessed increased attention to the issues facing First Nation education.

Key events and efforts include:

June 21, 2010 - AFN Paper on Post-Secondary Education prepared by First Nations education experts – emphasizing the critical need for expanded investment to support First Nation post secondary students. The launch of the paper was supported by the Presidents of five leading Canadian education organizations including the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), and the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL).

July 18, 2010 – AFN Annual General Assembly, Winnipeg Manitoba – The AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly confirm education as a priority and confirm full support for First Nations control of First Nation education policy framework.

Aug 3, 2010 – Council of the Federation – Premiers call for a First Ministers meeting to address First Nations education.

September 19-24, 2010 – National week of action on First Nations education including a rally on Parliament Hill, a 140 kilometer march from Kitigan Zibi First Nation to Ottawa, and First Nation advocacy day with parliamentarians and embassies.

November 12, 2010 – The Government of Canada endorses the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

November 17, 2010 - Shannen's Dream motion launched in the House of Commons, calling for equitable funding for all aspects of First Nations education.

December 1, 2010 –Private members Bill introduced in the House of Commons which would require the federal government to work with First Nations on a plan to address the funding inequity in First Nations education.

December, 2010 – The Government of **Canada supports priority** of addressing First Nation education in a letter from the Prime Minister and announces a **National Panel** on K-12 First Nation education to develop a path forward.

January – March, 2011 – AFN Pre-Budget Submission and Advocacy to all MPs regarding clear need for investment in education.

January –February, 2011 - WE day/ Free the Children initiatives – February focus on First Nation / Aboriginal education.

January 27, 2011 – Vancouver Island University hosts **Virtual Summit on First Nations Post-Secondary Education** with AFN National Chief Atleo.

February, 2011 – AFN posts online survey on First Nations post-secondary education.

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February 23, 2011 – Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) meets with National Aboriginal Organizations and confirms Aboriginal education as a priority.

March 10, 2011 – First Nations University of Canada hosts Virtual Summit on Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning (IIHL's) with AFN National Chief Atleo.

April 19, 2011 – The Aboriginal Affairs Ministers working group developed a work plan supporting improved communications, linkages with CMEC, and tools supporting improved education outcomes.

April 27, 2011 – Shannen's Dream Day of Action on Parliament Hill, organized by Members of Parliament, education organizations, and others. School children read their letters to the Prime Minister asking why the federal government allows inequity to persist in the way education is made available to First Nations children.

May 2011 – United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues enabled an opportunity for AFN to advance key sections of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples including those pertaining to education.

May 30, 2011 – Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities key note address by National Chief Atleo on First Nation education.

June 9, 2011 – "Our Dreams Matter Too – First Nations Children's Rights, Lives, and Education" report released by the Shannen's

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Dream Campaign to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on the occasion of Canada's 3rd and 4th periodic reviews.

Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE):

- The Association of Canadian Deans of Education signed an *Accord on Indigenous Education* on June 1, 2010 that supports, endorses, and fosters
 - Respectful and Welcoming Learning Environments
 - Respectful and Inclusive Curricula
 - Culturally Responsive Pedagogies
 - Mechanisms for Valuing and Promoting Indigeneity in Education
 - Culturally Responsive Assessment
 - Affirming and Revitalizing Indigenous Languages
 - Indigenous Education Leadership
 - Non-Indigenous Learners and Indigeneity
 - Culturally Respectful Indigenous Research

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC):

- Created and published a comprehensive inventory of Aboriginal programs and services in universities across Canada.
- Held National Working Summit on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in December, 2010
- Issued pre-budget submission calling for increased funding for Aboriginal graduate student scholarships by \$10 million per year for two years to create more positive role models in universities and called for funding for pilot programs to increase Aboriginal student access and retention in university programs.

Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC):

- Created and published a comprehensive inventory of Aboriginal programs and services in the colleges and Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning across Canada.
- Issued a pre-budget submission which called for greater investment in Aboriginal programs in colleges, and the lifting of the funding cap on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP)

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA):

- Continually referenced the need for financial support for First Nation Students including in their pre-budget submission.

Canadian Federation of Students (CFS):

- Continually referenced the need for financial support for First Nation Students including in their pre-budget submission.

Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT):

- Provided steadfast support for First Nations University of Canada.
- Called for the recognition that post-secondary education funding for First Nations students is a treaty right.

Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE):

- Potential youth literacy effort focused on First Nation schools.
- Proposing a project to publish books by Indigenous Authors in Canada to encourage literacy among FN Children.

Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF):

- ImagineAction is a project designed to encourage collaborative projects among schools.
- Have encouraged partnerships between First Nation schools and mainstream schools, resource lists of First Nations teachers, Elders and Traditional Teachers who could be called upon to assist in all classrooms.
- In 2010 released "A Study of Aboriginal Teachers' Professional Knowledge and Experience in Canadian Schools"
- Annual Outstanding Aboriginal Educator Award

Accenture - Skills to Succeed Youth Initiative:

- Responding to the training needs of First Nations youth by piloting a project with First Nations in Ontario that will eventually expand across Canada.
- Adapting program needs specifically to the education needs identified by community.

Belinda Stronach Foundation - One Laptop Per Child Program (OLPC):

- Committed to unlocking opportunities for Aboriginal children by improving access to quality education through technology.
- Distributed 5,000 laptops to Aboriginal children in Aboriginal communities aged six to twelve across Canada.

Canadian Commission for UNESCO:

- Highlighted First Nations languages and learning during Canadian Adult Learners' Week and International Adult Learners' Week.

Cenovus - Alberta Village Project:

- Piloting 'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child' – a pedagogical collaborative project between educators and business with First Nations in Alberta.

Enbridge - School Plus Program:

- Provides grants of up to \$20,000 for program enhancements at First Nation schools located in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.
- Funding enables schools to launch enrichment programming in the sciences, arts and music, literacy, technology, sports, outdoor education, afterschool activities, and the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural and language activities and events.

National Advisory Committee - Let's Talk Science

- AFN sits on this committee, chaired by Senator Lillian Dyck, which is an award-winning, national, charitable organization delivering science learning programs and services that turn children and youth on to science, keep them engaged in learning and develops their potential to become 21st century citizens, innovators and stewards.

UNICEF:

- Possibility of joint advocacy and effort on specific research projects.

EVERYONE NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED – JOIN OUR CALL TO ACTION

- We're calling on the federal government and the provincial governments to work hand-in-hand with First Nations to ensure equitable funding and support for First Nation education.
- We're asking all higher learning institutions in Canada to recognize, support and to contribute to improved First Nation education outcomes.
- We're asking Corporate Canada and philanthropic organizations to support us in partnership and with investments needed for programming, training and infrastructure.
- Sign up on our Call to Action website as a supporter. This is where you will also receive updates on how our partners are working to improve First Nations education and new ways you can help.
- Write to your Member of Parliament – you can find his/her contact information at www.parl.gc.ca.
- Plan an event in your school or community to raise awareness of the urgent need for all to be involved and all to contribute to improved First Nation education and understanding across Canadian society.

LOOKING FORWARD – TARGETS FOR 2012

As we look forward to June 2011- June 2012, there are clear targets that must be met to set us firmly and definitively on the path to real change for our children.

First, it is expected that the joint effort with the Federal Government on First Nation K-12 education will get underway as soon as possible. The federal election created a delay in launching engagement and dialogue on improvements needed in education. We are anxious to see this important work take place, for every region to have the opportunity to bring forward their specific strategies for advancing First Nation control of First Nation education and rapidly accelerating the support for and ultimate success of our students.

We anticipate a report no later than October 2011 and that this report will be tabled to both Canada and First Nations through the Minister and National Chief. This report must then serve as the basis for reflection and decision on a clear path forward. This path must respect the elements as set out in this call to action – including a statutory guarantee for fair, equitable funding and recognition of First Nation language, culture and education systems.

We set a clear target to advance commitment by the Federal Government within the next budgetary cycle.

At the same time, we have worked with the Provincial Governments through the Aboriginal Affairs Ministers Working Group and Council of Ministers of Education. We have advanced clear priorities and shared work plans. We look to every jurisdiction to advance specific plans to engage First Nations in supporting improved education outcomes and improved understanding and awareness of First Nations across provincial schools. At the upcoming Council of the Federation in July, we will seek commitment from every Premier of every province and territory to specific action supporting education for our children and for a better future. This means specific strategies, working with

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First Nations to improve graduation rates and supports and services that enable their success.

Finally, within every one of communities, we need ambitious targets too. With clear recognition and affirmation of support from the governments with whom we have an enduring relationship, we must all celebrate and honour our kids through our direct encouragement and our support. This means engaging all of our community members, as is our way, in supporting lifelong learning. We must honour the teachers among us, the keepers of language and culture. We must also encourage our children to explore every avenue to realize every dream in whatever field of study. As we enter this exciting phase of Nation building and re-building, our Nations need our own doctors, engineers, architects, accountants, scientists and scholars from every discipline so they can bring this knowledge along with our ways and our world view to support our future.

Education was once used as an instrument of oppression against our languages and cultures and tore our families apart. Now, we must and are turning this completely around. Education must now nurture, support and enable every child, every family and every community to grow and to thrive.

Education has the power to light the path and ignite the fires of all of our Nations creating hope and opportunity for our generations today and for years to come.
